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BRIEFS AND COMMENTS

POLAND: Labor Unrest

Spreading labor unrest in and around the Baltic coastal city of Gdansk may soon confront the regime with its most serious political challenge since strikes almost paralyzed Lublin in mid-July.

A strike by 17,000 workers in the Lenin shipyards remains unsettled and apparently has caused sympathy strikes in two other large shipyards and several smaller factories. Local transportation workers in Gdansk and two neighboring cities also have gone on strike. There are rumors that there will be a general strike in Gdansk on Monday.

Workers in the Lenin shipyards--among the most highly paid in Poland--have refused to return to work despite management's willingness to meet most of their demands, including a 12-percent pay increase. The workers, who have locked themselves in the shipyard and have been negotiating with management, reportedly also seek guarantees against reprisals, a reduction in meat prices, publication of their grievances, and a meeting with Premier Babiuch to press demands for a free trade union.

The local militia apparently have been mobilized and have cordoned off areas around the shipyards, but have been held back from direct contact with the strikers. Given the violent riots that occurred in Gdansk in 1970, any contact between workers and militia could lead to serious violence even though the militia probably are not armed. Violence in Gdansk might lead to protests in other parts of the country.

The regime has thus far continued the conciliatory approach that has carried it through six weeks of strikes and work slowdowns. Articles and commentary in the central media yesterday appealed to patriotism and self-restraint to get workers in Gdansk back on the job. Although such appeals have been effective in the past, they may have lost some of their impact during the prolonged period of labor unrest.

If the workers in Gdansk refuse to back down on their politically unacceptable demands for a free trade union, the leadership will be under pressure to take a

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tougher stance. During his just ended Crimean vacation, Gierek may have been counseled by the Soviets to become more aggressive.

Babiuch, in a speech to the nation yesterday, injected a note of toughness into Warsaw's conciliatory line. He warned the workers that they must return to work and that their actions are being exploited by "enemies" of Communist Poland. Babiuch also said that the meat price increases in July will not be rescinded and that meat supplies will not improve. He promised, however, that meat prices will remain frozen until the fall of 1981.

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